Giving Students a Fighting Chance: Pragmatics in the Language Classroom

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In order to give language learners a fighting chance outside the classroom, teachers must provide them with consciousness-raising opportunities for developing pragmatic awareness. By attending to pragmatic factors in second-language (L2) situations, students will be better able to make informed choices in negotiating effective communication. This article examines the potential use of the pragmatic discourse completion task discourse completion task (DCT) as a springboard for discussion in the L2 classroom. A description of a DCT used in a study involving advanced L2 learners at the University of Alberta (Ranta, 2002) is provided. The author also provides suggestions for developing students' pragmatic awareness.

Pour que les apprenants de langues aient une chance de s'en tirer en dehors de la salle de classe, il faut que les enseignants leur fournissent des occasions de sensibilisation leur permettant de développer une conscience pragmatique. Si les apprenants portent attention aux facteurs pragmatiques pendant les situations en L2, ils seront mieux en mesure d'effectuer des choix éclairés et de communiquer de façon plus efficace. Cet article porte sur l'emploi possible de tests de closure portant sur le discours (DCT) pour déclencher des discussions en L2. Une description est fournie d'un DCT employé lors d'une étude impliquant des apprenants L2 de niveau avancé à l'université de l'Alberta (Ranta, 2002). L'auteur inclut des suggestions de moyens visant le développement d'une conscience pragmatique chez les étudiants.

Introduction

Imagine the dreadful feeling of embarrassment after realizing what you have just said with great care and consideration has been unexpectedly misinterpreted by a displeased listener. The potential for this communication breakdown is increased if you are using a second language (L2). Consequently, when learning an L2, an individual's ability to communicate effectively is not solely dependent on his or her linguistic competence. Rather, effective communication in an L2 also includes the non-native speaker's ability to use the language appropriately in various situations, depending on factors such as setting, context, and the relationships between speakers (Washburn, 2001).

Common speech routines such as apologizing, requesting, refusing, complaining, and giving and responding to compliments require L2 pragmatic competence. Developing pragmatic competence in an L2 can be perceived as developing one's sociocultural savvy (Cohen, 1996). As English and its World English hybrids spread across cultures (Kachru & Nelson, 2001), context-specific pragmatic competence is becoming increasingly important. Proficiency in a second language involves more than grammatical competence: proficiency in a second language also requires pragmatic competence.

Language instructors may question whether L2 pragmatics should be taught in the classroom because pragmatic knowledge may simply develop alongside grammatical knowledge without any pedagogic intervention (Kasper, 1997). However, we cannot be sure that learners are aware of or notice the complexities of the use of English in various contexts. Furthermore, the language classroom environment and most English learning resource materials lack sufficient authentic content and situations necessary for improving students' pragmatic competence.

Although a number of basic aspects of pragmatics such as apologizing may be universal (Kasper & Schmidt, 1996), there are differences between all languages and cultures. In some situations, learners may assume universality and transfer L1 pragmatics that do not necessarily convey the same meaning in an English context. For example, a native Japanese speaker may provide a vague response to an English question that requires a clear acceptance or refusal. The Japanese speaker might be transferring an aspect of his or her L1 pragmatics: a vague answer is a polite No. Thus what is perceived as polite in one culture may been seen as rude in another. Similarly, what is considered a compliment in one culture may be taken negatively in another. A treatment of potential differences such as these merits increased consideration in second-language teaching and materials development (Meier, 1997).

Language classrooms offer learners the opportunity to explore and experiment with various pragmatic strategies in a safe environment where mistakes are readily tolerated. Furthermore, the explicit teaching of appropriate English forms, functions, and uses may build on learned vocabulary and linguistic structures, thus improving learners' grammatical competence. It is necessary to provide explicit consciousness-raising instruction that will help learners to become more aware of both universal pragmatic knowledge and pragmatic differences between languages and cultures.

The goal of this article is to contribute to the enhancement of ESL/EFL pedagogy and the development of teaching materials that are better informed pragmatically. I examine the potential use of the pragmatic discourse completion task (DCT) as a springboard for discussion in the L2 classroom. A description of a DCT used in a study involving advanced L2 learners at the University of Alberta (Ranta, 2002) is provided.

Definitions of Language Competences

In order to clarify how pragmatic competence fits into the larger, complicated, spectrum of language ability, it is necessary first to consider how L2 researchers have defined language competences.

Grammatical Competence

Bachman (1990) argues that grammatical competence includes the individual's knowledge of vocabulary, morphology, syntax, and phonology. To illustrate how a language learner demonstrates grammatical competence, Bachman (1990) presents an example of a hypothetical test-taker. Suppose a learner is shown a picture of two people, a boy and a taller girl, and is asked to describe it. Bachman suggests that by describing the picture, the learner demonstrates lexical competence by choosing appropriate words (*boy, girl, tall*) and shows knowledge of morphology by affixing the inflectional morpheme (*-er*) to tall. The learner demonstrates syntactic competence by ordering the words properly to make the sentence *The girl is taller than the boy,* and finally, the learner displays phonological competence by producing the utterance according to the phonological rules of English.

Communicative Competence

Because grammatical competence is necessary for learners to communicate in a second language, is it safe to assume that students who can produce beautiful prepositional phrases will be able to make a toast at a faculty social event? In 1980, Canale and Swain proposed an influential model of communicative competence that includes sociolinguistic competence. Niezgoda and Röver (2001) summarize the subcompetences subsumed under this model as follows:

- *grammatical competence*—the knowledge of linguistic code features such as morphology, syntax, semantics, phonology;
- *sociolinguistic competence*—the knowledge of contextually appropriate language use;
- *discourse competence*—the knowledge of achieving coherence and cohesion in spoken or written communication;
- *strategic competence*—the knowledge of how to use communication strategies to handle breakdowns in communication and make communication effective. (p. 64)

Bachman's (1990) model of communicative competence also provides an inclusive description of the knowledge required to use language. In addition to the knowledge of grammatical rules, communicative competence includes the knowledge of how language is used to achieve particular communicative goals. Bachman subdivides language competence into organizational competence and pragmatic competence. Organizational competence concerns a speaker's control of the formal aspects of language and is further subdivided

into grammatical competence (vocabulary, syntax, morphology, phonology) and textual competence (cohesion/coherence, rhetorical organization). Pragmatic competence is subdivided into sociolinguistic and illocutionary competence (Niezgoda & Röver, 2001).

Bachman (1990) maintains that sociolinguistic competence "enables us to perform language functions in ways that are appropriate to that context" (p. 94), and it includes sensitivity to differences in dialect or variety, sensitivity to differences in register, sensitivity to naturalness, and ability to interpret cultural references and figures of speech. Illocutionary competence relates to the relationships between utterances and the acts or functions that speakers or writers intend to perform through these utterances and the characteristics of the context of language use that determine the appropriateness of utterances. For example, if a person were to say *Don't lock the door*, it could indicate that he or she is planning to come back soon. Conversely, it could mean that he or she wishes to be welcome to come back. There are many possible interpretations of the statement. Illocutionary competence, therefore, refers to an individual's ability to understand the illocutionary force and appropriateness of utterances.

Although researchers may differ on how to label and categorize specific language competences, they fundamentally agree that both grammatical competence and pragmatic or sociolinguistic competence contribute to the language learner's overall communicative ability.

Pragmatics and Pragmatic Competence

Thomas (1995) refers to pragmatics as *meaning in interaction*: meaning is not something that is inherent in the words alone. Making meaning is a dynamic process of negotiation involving both speaker and hearer. Kasper (1997) defines this negotiation of meaning more specifically as it relates to second-language acquisition (SLA) as communicative action in its sociocultural context. The communicative action need not include only speech acts such as requesting, greeting, and apologizing, but also participating in conversation and engaging in various kinds of discourse.

Pragmatics in language-learning involves the role of context in non-native speakers' communication in the target language. Pragmatic knowledge can be seen as the interaction of other knowledge—grammatical, lexical, phonological, sociocultural, and world knowledge—with language users combining elements of all of these to achieve communicative goals (Kasper, 1992).

Pragmatic competence, which helps facilitate this process, is defined by Koike (1989) as "the speaker's knowledge and use of rules of appropriateness and politeness which dictate the way the speaker will understand and formulate speech acts" (p. 179). If an ESL student, for example, tells the program director to *do this for me* rather than opt for a more appropriate request such

as *I was wondering if you could help me,* then this pragmatic failure may cause cross-cultural communication breakdown.

Pragmatic competence can be subdivided into two components: pragmalinguistics and sociopragmatics. Kasper (1997) defines pragmalinguistics as "the resources for conveying communicative acts and relational or interpersonal relations" (p. 1). Resources could include strategies such as directness and indirectness, as well as routines and linguistic forms that can intensify or soften communicative acts. Pragmalinguistic failure happens when the meaning of the language learner's utterance is different from that most frequently used by native speakers or when speech act strategies are inappropriately transferred from an L1 to an L2 (Nelson, Al-Batal, & Echols, 1996). It is possible that pragmalinguistic failure is perceived by native speakers as rudeness or evasiveness (Hudson, Detmer, & Brown, 1992). An example of pragmalinguistic failure is if a non-native speaker of English, perhaps transferring an apology pattern from his or her L1, offers a simple *sorry about that* when a more meaningful *I'm really sorry—please forgive my rudeness* would be a more appropriate apology.

Failure is also possible at the sociopragmatics level. Sociopragmatics involves the social perceptions underlying participants' interpretation and performance of communicative action and includes variables such as gender, social distance, and intimacy of relationship (Kasper, 1997). Sociopragmatic failure, therefore, occurs when the language learner uses inappropriate utterances due to a misunderstanding of social standards (Hudson et al., 1992). An example of this type of failure is when a student asks about the teacher's salary; this question may be tolerable in the L1 context, but in most English language classrooms, this type of personal question is taboo.

Despite these definitions for pragmalinguistic and sociopragmatic failure, the difference between the two remains unclear. Hudson et al. (1992) warn that there is *no* absolute distinction between the two types of failure because sociopragmatic concerns are realized pragmalinguistically. For example, if a student calls out *teacher* in the classroom (as is done in many Japanese classrooms where the teacher is called *sensei*), he or she is guilty of pragmalinguistic failure for not saying, "Excuse me, Ms. Smith"—or he or she is guilty of sociopragmatic failure because this way of getting the teacher's attention is not how it is done in most English-language classrooms. Given the array of social circumstances leading to potential pragmatic failure, it is evident that the development of pragmatic competence in an L2 presents a daunting endeavor for the second-language learner.

Ellis (1994) points out that SLA research has identified three factors that are of major importance in the acquisition of pragmatic competence. The first is the level of learner's linguistic competence. Naturally, in order to put together an utterance such as *I was wondering if I could ...,* a learner must possess the linguistic skills to do so. The second factor is the importance of L1

to L2 positive and negative transfer. The role of the speaker's L1 culture cannot be ignored. If the L1 cultural communication patterns are similar to those of the English-speaking country in which the learners find themselves, for example, then perhaps they will have the advantage of experiencing more positive than negative transfer. The third factor of importance in the acquisition of pragmatic competence is the status of the learner. Ellis contends that learners do not usually participate in communicative events as equals. For example, ESL learners may not enjoy the ability or opportunity to nominate topics of conversation and to contend for turns when speaking to native speakers. This restricts the range of speech acts they will need to perform.

Bardovi-Harlig (2001) argues that, taken as a whole, the relatively small amount of research in the area of the effects of explicit pragmatic instruction in the L2 classroom illustrates that learners who do not receive instruction show divergence in L2 pragmatics. Bardovi-Harlig also stresses that "without input, acquisition cannot take place ... we owe it to learners to help them interpret indirect speech acts as in the case of implicature, and the social use of speech acts, as in the case of compliments" (p. 31). By providing L2 pragmatic input such as authentic resources based on native speaker pragmatic usage, language teachers may well be empowering learners to play the pragmatics game with more of *a fighting chance.*

Assessing Pragmatic Competence

Hudson (2001) reports that although there are established tests (e.g., TOEFL; TOEIC; TSE) for assessing various areas of language production such as syntax, vocabulary, and cohesion, similar instruments have not been developed for the assessment of pragmatics. One of the primary issues in developing instruments that assess pragmatic competence is the variability of speaker behavior in discourse (Hudson et al., 1992). Indeed, who would expect native speakers of English always to agree on what to say and how to say it? Furthermore, should assessment of pragmatic competence be quantitative or qualitative—or should it be a combination of both?

In defense of her ethnographic approach to L2 pragmatic acquisition research, Li (2000) argues that most interlanguage pragmatics studies have used data primarily taken from experimental, contrived, or controlled situations, usually with the production of responses to written prompts in a discourse completion task (DCT). This assessment of learners is based on deviation from native speaker norms. Li advocates investigating the interactive nature and the social function and consequences of speech acts that are embedded deeply in historical, social, and cultural contexts.

Although admitting that spontaneous speech gathered by ethnographic observation provides the most authentic data in L2 pragmatics research, one must also concede that the difficulties of this type of research abound. Trou-

blesome issues that may arise include time constraints, access to workplaces or classrooms for long periods, potential confounding variables such as events and relationships that happen outside the research context, participant attrition, generalizability of results, and so forth. Difficulties such as these have led to widespread use of the DCT elicitation procedure (Billmyer & Varghese, 2000). Therefore, although the DCT is sometimes criticized as being a contrived means of getting data, administrative advantages and ease of use make this type of assessment practical. However, Hudson (2001) advises that the DCT should be used for research purposes only, and that no examinee level decisions should be made in pedagogical settings.

The Potential Classroom Use of the Pragmatic Discourse Completion Task

Background. Although the DCT instrument is used by researchers in assessment of L2 pragmatic competence, there may be potential for more practical use of such an instrument that has been so meticulously developed. Surely such an instrument can be beneficial to the L2 teacher. In an attempt to illustrate how researcher-developed material can and should be used by teachers and resource developers, I explain how a DCT was used with a group of advanced English learners as a tool for discussion—making the contrived more meaningful.

The data collected as part of a study of Mandarin L1 graduate students (Ranta, 2002) were made available to me by Dr. Ranta at the University of Alberta. In my capacity as research assistant, I had the opportunity to ask the study participants to complete a revised version of the Hudson, Detmer, and Brown (1995) DCT. The 18 students in the study had been in Canada for less than a year, and they had all studied English at university in China. Graduate programs in which the students were enrolled included computer science, mathematics, biology, chemistry, physics, library science, and engineering.

The original DCT (Hudson et al., 1995) included three versions, each consisting of 24 scenarios. Writing answers for and talking about 24 situations would have taken participants too long; therefore, 10 scenarios were chosen for this activity. The situations were representative of the three speech acts of requests, refusals, and apologies, and they included a variety of the three independent and culturally sensitive variables as identified by the researchers: relative power, social distance, and potential imposition. This revised DCT, including administration procedure, can be found in the Appendix.

Procedure. After asking the participants to complete the DCT, which took about 15-20 minutes, I conducted interviews in order to ask them to elaborate on their answers. Each DCT interview included two students and me, and we spoke casually for about 25 minutes. The participants understood that the DCT was not a form of assessment; therefore, the writing of grammatically

correct answers was not an issue. The participants were asked to elaborate orally on their written answers and to come to some consensus about what might be appropriate in certain situations. Native speaker answers were not collected as a base norm, and participant answers were not assessed as they were in the Hudson study (2001). The DCT was being used as a tool for discussion—not as a tool for assessment.

Based on including the widest possible range of individual differences, I chose three interviews (six participants) to transcribe. The group of participants consisted of both male and female students, some who were outgoing, some who were reserved, some who spoke English relatively well, and others who were less fluent. The group also included the youngest student (23), the oldest student (34), and both single and married students. TOEFL scores of the students ranged from 550 to 640. The pairs were as follows (all names are pseudonyms): Jun (male) and Yang (female); Yuan (male) and Zhen (male); Lin (female) and Ming (female).

During the interviews, I noticed that certain situations elicited more discussion from participants than others. These discussions prompted participants to think and talk about what they would say or do in varying scenarios. We therefore engaged in thinking and talking about pragmatics—metapragmatics. The following discussion identifies situations that demonstrated the potential use of the DCT as a catalyst for discussion tasks for the L2 classroom.

Discussion. After I had looked at both the written DCTs and the transcripts of the interviews, some trends became evident regarding the types of situations that elicited more discussion and the variation in opinions. Rather than quantifying trends, I decided to address the issue from the perspective of a teacher: what situations would I use for eliciting discussion about pragmatics in my classroom? Whereas some situations did not seem to prompt much conversation, others led to interesting discussion topics such as humor, personality, culture, and employment—all of which are common topics or themes in most language classrooms.

Most of the participants agreed on what they would say in low-imposition situations such as asking to borrow a pen from someone (a superior or not) during a meeting (situation 4). For example, Ming wrote, "Excuse me. Do you have an extra pen that I can borrow for a while? Thanks so much." It is obvious that this student has the pragmalinguistic ability to put together a well-constructed request. In another example, Zhen said, "Excuse me. Can you borrow your pen to me?" Although this student made a grammatical mistake, the request would probably be understood by the hearer. This situation did not elicit much discussion from any of the participants.

In a similar situation (situation 9) in which the participant takes the role of a member of a local ski club and the president of the club asks to borrow a pen when he or she only has one, most of the participants had no problem

giving a polite refusal. Once again, when asked whether or not it mattered to whom one made the refusal, all the students answered that it did not. From a teaching perspective, an interesting point to consider is that some of the students followed the refusal with a suggestion. For example, Jun wrote, "Sorry. Can you borrow it from others? I need it now" and Yang wrote, "I'm sorry. I have no extra one. Could you ask for others?"

Students who do not know how to follow a refusal with a suggestion could be given explicit examples in the classroom, or they could be asked why they do not offer a suggestion. There is no rule stating that a suggestion must be given; rather, helping students to become more aware of pragmatic use of language can lead them to making more informed choices.

Furthermore, discussion of the pen scenario (situation 9) prompted one participant to admit that he would change his answer if the power relationship differed. Jun wrote a refusal, but in the interview afterward, he revealed that he would give the pen to a supervisor:

Jun:	"Sorry I cannot. Can you borrow it from others" ... and maybe because this (president of a) skiing club is not important for me (laughs).
Interviewer:	So it's not like your supervisor,
Jun:	Yeah ... supervisor is very powerful. I know ...
Interviewer:	So if it was your supervisor, would you give the pen?
Jun:	Yeah (laughs).

This student went on to mention that a supervisor in China might take the pen without asking. Whether or not this is true, this type of remark can be used in further discussion about differences between life in the workplace in various countries.

Although the participants in the study were all from China, intracultural and personality differences evidenced by Jun's comments in the pen scenario emerged in some DCT situations. One of the most interesting differences was participants' use of humor when apologizing in the following situation.

> *Situation 8:* You are the president of the local chapter of a national hiking club. Every month the club goes on a hiking trip and you are responsible for organizing it. You are on this month's trip and have borrowed another member's hiking book. You are hiking by a river and stop to look at the book. The book slips from your hand, falls in the river and washes away. You hike on to the rest stop where you meet up with the owner of the book.
> *You say:* _____ (Hudson et al., 1995, p. 90)

All six participants said *sorry*, and some offered to buy a new book. However, this was the only situation that elicited a trend of using humor

when making an informal apology. Three of the six students included humor in their apologies. For example,

Yang:	Oh I'm awfully sorry that the book was ate by the river don't worry I'll buy a new one or some others for you.
Zhen:	Oh my God! Your book sleep in the river. It's a good place but it's my fault. I'm sorry!
Ming:	Oh my, your book jumped into the river and swam away. Is that OK if I return another book to you next time?

When asked why she used a joke in this situation, Yang commented that hiking was not a serious matter, so the owner of the book would probably not mind. Zhen said that because it was only about a book, a joke was appropriate. When asked if it would be different if the book belonged to the president of the hiking club, Zhen said maybe, and Yuan said that there would be no difference. Most of the students agreed that humor was acceptable because hiking is a casual activity, and the lost item, a book, was not expensive.

This situation is made relevant to pragmatics and the L2 classroom by the fact that it brought out discussion about humor and personality. In a similar situation (situation 6), apologizing to a superior for misplacing a borrowed computer disk, students also displayed differences in their answers, but none used humor. Contrasting DCT situations such as these can be used in the L2 classroom for group discussions about when and where it may be appropriate to use humor in English. There is no correct answer; nevertheless, students can discuss both appropriateness and grammar issues when exploring when and how to use humor in L2 conversations. What may be appropriate in one culture may be considered rude in another. It is essential for learners to be aware of the consequences of their use of language.

Another example of how participants' responses varied in similar situations occurred in the case of refusals. The following situations elicited refusals, but the amount of information provided by the participants differed according to the relationships involved.

> *Situation 7:* You are shopping in a department store. You have selected an item and are waiting to pay for it. The salesclerk helps you and explains that there is a special offer on a new product and offers to show you a short demonstration. You cannot watch the demonstration because you are on your way to meet someone for lunch.
> *You say:* _____ (Hudson et al., 1995, p. 91)

> *Situation 5:* You are a teacher at a large school. You see the lead teacher on campus. The lead teacher asks you to call all of the other teachers tonight and tell them that there will be a meeting tomorrow. You cannot

do it because you know that it will take hours and you have friends coming over to your house tonight.
*You say:*_____ (Hudson et al., 1995, p. 87)

Whereas the shopping situation involved refusing a request from a sales clerk, the school situation necessitated refusing a request from a supervisor. Most of the participants gave short answers for the shopping situation. For example, Ming responded, "Thank you for your introduction. But I am in a hurry and can't stay here long." Similarly, Yuan said, "Really, that's great, but I have no time to watch the demonstration. Maybe next time. Thank you very much."

Left alone, this situation did not elicit much conversation; however, when contrasted with situation 7, the topics of workplace culture and power relationships arose. Many of the students provided more information when they made refusals to a workplace superior. Ming responded, "I really want to help you. But I have an appointment tonight and time is up to meet the people. Can I forward your message to other teachers that might be helpful?" Yuan answered, "Sorry, sir, I can't do that for you today because I had already set a appointment with my friends. We haven't met each other for a long time. Could you find other to do that?" The other participants had similar answers.

When I commented to some students that they supplied reasons when refusing to a supervisor and did not when refusing to a sales clerk, discussion flowed. For example, Zhen revealed that maybe the supervisor would be suspicious if the employee gave a vague refusal: "Oh, I wonder what that guy is doing tonight." Lin explained that we are entitled to have our private lives, but it would be a good idea to help the lead teacher find another solution to the problem (e.g., e-mail teachers; ask someone else to do it). Furthermore, although he supplied a refusal on his written DCT, Jun revealed in the interview that he would probably give in to the request of the lead teacher: "Oh maybe I ... I think in such a situation I will do it ... I think is leader so I ... yeah, I always do that (laughs)." When I asked Jun if his response was influenced by his cultural background, he replied, "Be my nature ... my personality ... sometimes it makes me uh very ... not feel bad [when helping others]."

The discussion with Jun in this case continued to the topic of work relationships in China. He explained that he had worked in a government office for four years before returning to university for graduate studies; therefore, he might have a different perspective from that of younger Chinese graduate students. Considering my own experiences of being an older graduate student, I found this observation both intriguing and helpful—one must remember that even if you are working with a homogeneous group (same L1), individual differences must not be ignored.

Furthermore, in regard to teaching and the potential use for the DCT in the L2 classroom, situations 5 and 7 prompted *students* to do some asking. Yuan asked me, "Would you give the reason?" This short question elicited from me a huge smile: we were engaging in metapragmatics, and the students wanted to know more (one of those teachable moments). This led to discussion about private life and work responsibility. Also, when I asked Lin whether she would change her answer if she were in a Chinese situation, she asked, "Why it makes a difference between Canada and China in this question?" This led to a discussion about people in the workplace, regardless of where that workplace is. Discussions like this should be encouraged in the L2 classroom.

Although the participants in the study were all graduate students, the topic of workplace pragmatics was by far the most interesting to them. The participants will soon be seeking employment; therefore, it was no surprise to find that the following situation involving requesting a job interview also elicited discussion.

> *Situation 10:* You are applying for a new job in a small company and want to make an appointment for an interview. You know the manager is very busy and only schedules interviews in the afternoon from one to four o'clock. However, you currently work in the afternoon. You go into the office this morning to turn in your application form when you see the manager.
> *You say:* _____ (Hudson et al., 1995, p. 88)

Five of the participants responded with polite requests. For example, Lin asked, "Is it possible the interview can be arranged this morning? I'm currently working in the afternoon." All the participants appeared interested in this situation, and Zhen provided the most daring response when he declared, "Excuse me. This is my application form. I think I'm the suitable man for this position." At first, I wondered if Zhen understood the degree of directness he was using, but after asking him to elaborate, he stated that he thought this type of approach would show confidence in one's ability to do the job: "you have confidence to talk with the manager ... so the manager think, 'Oh yeah you're special guy'" (snaps fingers).

In an L2 classroom setting, Zhen could discuss his assumption with classmates followed by explicit instruction by the teacher on effective interview-taking techniques. If the teacher is not confident speaking about this area, he or she could invite a human resources specialist or career counselor to come and talk to the class. Students could also create a questionnaire about interview techniques and ask native speakers to reply. This topic of interviews and workplace pragmatics is relevant to most adult L2 learners' lives.

In summary, DCT scenarios about shopping and roommates did not elicit much discussion; however, scenarios that involved workplace requests,

refusals, and apologies brought out individual opinions and personal experiences. On reflection, using the DCT was much like using a computer—depending on *how* you use it, results will vary. During the interviews, I focused on what the participants would say or do in given situations. I should have prompted the students to talk more about their experiences in relation to the situations provided. Despite this drawback, one of the six participants, Jun, was always quick to bring up a personal anecdote related to most of the situations—he had broken a friend's cup; he had lost a colleague's disk; and he had been through the job interview process on campus in China. Ideally, activities for discussions in the L2 classroom should take advantage of the wide range of abilities, experiences, interests, and needs of adult learners. I should have probed more into the participants' experiences with apology, refusal, and request situations in order to make the scenarios more personally relevant to them and thus encourage more meaningful and emotional discussion.

Furthermore, most of the situations in the Hudson et al. (1995) DCT are short. Billmyer and Varghese (2000) argue that enhancing situational prompts can produce even longer, more elaborate responses from L2 learners. Rather than providing learners with one- or two-sentence prompts, Billmyer and Varghese suggest that content-enriched DCT prompts have the potential to elicit robust elaboration during simulated classroom practice situations. Knowing more about *when, where,* and *with whom* can supply learners with context-enriched support to help them envisage a wider range of social relationships than those that occur naturally in the classroom.

As to the participants, whereas the students in many ESL classrooms include an international mix, the students mentioned in this article are from the same language background. Therefore, it would be interesting to conduct similar research with learners from varied language and cultural backgrounds (including native speakers) in order to further exploit discussions about differences and similarities across cultures. Also, in TEFL settings, it would be intriguing to conduct DCT scenario conversations in a World Englishes context.

Nonetheless, the revised DCT proved successful as a tool for eliciting discussion among the participants in the study (Ranta, 2002). The DCT has potential as a tool to help provide learners with the three essential conditions for language-learning: exposure to rich but comprehensible input; use of the language to do things; and motivation to process and use the language (Willis, 1996). A fourth desirable condition, instruction, must be added in order to take advantage of this potential tool for developing L2 pragmatic awareness.

Implications for Teaching Pragmatics in the L2 Classroom

If research focusing on the beneficial effects of explicit pragmatic instruction continues to produce promising results, the question should change from whether to teach aspects of L2 pragmatics in the classroom to how to teach them. First, consideration must be given to the importance of students' individual differences, motivation, and learning style preferences as they relate to the acquisition of L2 pragmatic competence (Cohen, 1996). We cannot assume that all students want to achieve native speaker-like communicative competence. It is possible that for some second-language learners *good enough* is preferable; total convergence to certain native speaker norms may not be desirable. Giles, Coupland, and Coupland (1991) suggest that language learners may opt for pragmatic distinctiveness as a strategy of identity assertion; therefore, teachers must recognize that optimal convergence rather than total convergence may be a more realistic and desirable goal. Nevertheless, there are many aspects of pragmatic competence that can and should be developed in the L2 classroom through explicit consciousness-raising activities.

Matsuda (1999) warns that in extreme cases of low pragmatic competence (L1 or L2), individuals may experience difficulty establishing social relationships with members of work, academic, or social communities and may even be denied valuable academic and professional opportunities. It is evident that there are potentially devastating consequences due to lack of pragmatic competence; thus the argument for the teaching of pragmatics, especially in the ESL setting, is strong.

In order for learners to have a fighting chance, they must be aware of the consequences of making pragmatic choices (Rose & Kasper, 2001). The adoption of sociocultural rules as one's own in an L2 is certainly an individual decision (Bardovi-Harlig, 2001), and the choice of how to act is ultimately up to the individual. However, the choice of how to provide pragmatic awareness to the learner so that he or she can make informed pragmatic decisions is the responsibility of the teacher and the developers of curriculum and resource materials.

In an analysis of politeness in English language textbooks used in Japan, LoCastro (1997) abandoned her original plan to count the frequency of occurrence of linguistic forms of politeness because the number of tokens of such occurrences was found to be so low as to be insignificant. Many English-language resources include interesting topics and communicative activities, but most do not provide learners with rich input that would reduce the overuse of formulaic expressions. For example, students may learn *I want you to* from a textbook dialogue, but not be given information about the use of modals in English to make requests (*I would like you to*). Nonetheless, Locastro reported that some recently published materials for

intermediate or advanced learners do include attention to language use and style-shifting according to context and discourse participants. Yet Washburn (2001) adds that even if textbook dialogues model natural conversations, characters are usually one-dimensional, their relationships are defined stereotypically (e.g., classmates, teacher-student, supervisor-worker), and their motivations are simplistic.

In recent years, form-focused instruction for developing language students' grammatical competence has been emphasized (Lightbown & Spada, 1999). For example, rather than simply having students engage in a variety of communicative speaking activities without providing explicit reference to grammar, teachers are being encouraged to take time to develop students' awareness of language structures. Communicative language lessons can be enhanced with timely, explicit focus on form. A variation of form-focused instruction can also be used to increase students' level of pragmatic competence. Students who are given opportunities to focus on authentic and context-specific areas of target language pragmatics such as apologizing, requesting, suggesting, and refusing will be able to develop pragmatic competence better than students who do not receive such opportunities.

Examples of explicit pragmatic instruction include: using metapragmatic language (e.g., talking about and using the terms *apologies, refusals,* and *requests*); having group and class discussions about appropriate uses of English in various situations (e.g., after watching some clips of various restaurant scenes from television and movies); and providing students with concrete examples of how varying forms affect the meanings of utterances (e.g., the use of modals softens requests: *Could you lend me a pen?*). Grammatical forms such as modals are often needed to perform certain speech acts; thus putting them into meaningful contexts follows Celce-Murcia and Larsen-Freeman's (1999) form-meaning-use approach to teaching grammar. Regardless of the type of explicit pragmatic instruction, the purpose is to increase the students' awareness of what they already know about universal or transferable L1 pragmatic knowledge and to encourage them to notice aspects of pragmatics that are particular to English (Rose & Kasper, 2001).

Judd (1999) suggests providing learners with samples of natural discourse in which various pragmatic and sociolinguistic variables are demonstrated. Students often believe that there is only one way for a speech act to appear and that this form works in all situations. By using contrastive examples such as younger people and an elderly couple, or a new employee with the CEO of a company, teachers and resource developers can provide students with a richer variety of input for pragmatic consciousness-raising. Judd contends that teachers should help students to develop pragmatic awareness so that they can figure out pragmatic meaning when they encounter it outside the classroom.

Washburn (2001) acknowledges that not all language learners are equally concerned with the acquisition of pragmatic norms. However, those who do wish to learn more about pragmatic language use need rich and salient materials. Washburn suggests that television situational comedies offer good conditions for pragmatic language-learning and teaching materials and explains how she used clips from *Seinfeld* in the classroom. For example, in one clip, Jerry wants to know a woman's name (he had forgotten it and was embarrassed to ask) and makes the rules of self-introduction explicit (*she'll be forced to say her name*) when he asks Kramer to introduce herself. Unfortunately their ploy failed; nevertheless, this clip can be used as a discussion starter in the language classroom: if someone states his or her name, does this require you to do the same? What do you do if you forget someone's name? Discussions based on contextualized speech routines can be both relevant and enjoyable. Furthermore, Washburn argues that sitcoms can remove from the teacher the responsibility of being the sole supplier, interpreter, and/or judge of pragmatic language use.

Bardovi-Harlig and Hartford (1996) also suggest that teachers use class discussions of pragmatics to trigger new awareness of form. An example of the positive effects of this type of awareness-raising strategy is illustrated in the case of a non-native English-speaking student who tried out his new knowledge in an academic advisory session when he told his advisor, "I am going to take, no, I was thinking of taking Testing next semester" (p. 185). The student attributed his self-correction to the previous day's class discussion. This anecdote illustrates how explicit pragmatic instruction in the form of an awareness-raising discussion can resemble a form of scaffolding. Teachers can provide students with opportunities to challenge their stereotypes or misconceptions while encouraging learner-centered development of pragmatic competence in a second language.

Giving students more control over their pragmatic learning can foster their growth as autonomous learners. Tanaka (1997) advocates a learners-as-researchers approach in which learners discuss or write about L2 sociocultural rules and design their own research activities in order to learn more about assumptions. Students then venture into the community, interview native speakers, and conduct research on sociocultural topics. Discussions and presentations are encouraged back in the classroom where learners can reflect on prior assumptions in the light of their findings.

Although pragmatic information provided via explicit instruction is no guarantee of pragmatic development, such instruction is essential for avoiding negative pragmatic transfer (Rose, 2000). Unquestionably, there are limitations to the learning of pragmatics of an L2 in a classroom setting; nevertheless, the absence of L2 pragmatic awareness-raising strategies would indeed be a disservice to second-language learners. Many learners develop characteristics that reveal a lack of target language pragmatic com-

petence because of the curriculum's and the teacher's failure to emphasize its importance. Facilitating learners' acquisition of pragmatic competence should be an important goal in English-language classrooms (Austin, 1998; Tanaka, 1997).

Conclusion

This article examines the potential use of the pragmatic DCT as an impetus for discussion in the English classroom and provides suggestions for developing students' pragmatic awareness. In reference to the spread of English and World Englishes around the globe, Crystal (2001) proclaims that it is a brave new world, and those who have to be bravest of all are the teachers. Research provides a valuable source of information for language teachers to make informed decisions about teaching pragmatics: empowering the teacher as decision-maker. In order to give language learners a *fighting chance* outside the classroom, teachers must provide them with consciousness-raising opportunities that will help them to develop pragmatic awareness. Teachers can help learners to notice pragmatic factors in L2 situations, so that they can better make informed choices in negotiating effective communication: empowering the learner as decision-maker.

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Appendix
Revised Pragmatics Discourse Completion Task

Procedure

1. Ask each participant to read through the task and write what they would say in the situations given.
2. Participants should not spend a long time thinking about answers. Explain that they may write as though they are speaking, that is, they need not worry too much about spelling and perfect grammar. This process should take about 15 - 20 minutes.
3. In pairs, the participants will join the interviewer for a discussion about the situations in the task. The participants can explain what they would say in each situation and why they would say it. The interviewer should guide the discussion and encourage the participants to try to come to a consensus on what one should say in the situations.
4. The topics that emerge from the situations can be used as a springboard for exploring students' rationale for their opinions (What are they basing their decisions on? Past experiences? Personal or cultural values?)
5. The discussion should last about 30 minutes and be recorded for later transcription.

Revised Pragmatics Discourse Completion Task

Adapted from Hudson, Detmer, and Brown (1995)

Directions:	Read each of the situations on the following pages. After each situation, write what you would say in the situation in a normal conversation.

Situation 1: You are shopping for your friend's birthday and see something in a display case. You want to look at it more closely. A sales clerk comes over to you. ***You say:***

_____
_____
_____

Situation 2: You live in a large house. You hold the lease to the house and rent out the other rooms. You are in the room of one of your housemates collecting the rent. You reach to take the rent cheque when you accidentally knock over a small, empty vase on the desk. It doesn't break. ***You say:***

Situation 3: You work in a small shop that repairs jewelry. A valued customer comes into the shop to pick up an antique watch that you know is to be a present. It is not ready yet, even though you promised it would be. ***You say:***

Situation 4: You work in a small department of a large office. You are in a department meeting now. You need to borrow a pen in order to take some notes. The head of your department is sitting next to you and might have an extra pen. ***You say:***

Situation 5: You are a teacher at a large school. You see the lead teacher on campus. The lead teacher asks you to call all of the other teachers tonight and tell them that there will be a meeting tomorrow. You cannot do it because you know that it will take hours and you have friends coming over to your house tonight. ***You say:***

Situation 6: You work in a small department of a large office. Last week the head of the department loaned you a computer file on disk. You can't find the disk, and think you have lost it. You have just finished a meeting with your department when the head of the department passes near you. ***You say:***

Situation 7: You are shopping in a department store. You have selected an item and are waiting to pay for it. The salesclerk helps you, explains that there is a special offer on a new product, and offers to give you a short demonstration. You cannot watch the demonstration because you are on your way to meet someone for lunch. ***You say:***

Situation 8: You are the president of the local chapter of a national hiking club. Every month the club goes on a hiking trip and you are responsible for organizing it. You are on this month's trip and have borrowed another member's hiking book. You are hiking by a river and stop to look at the book. The book slips from your hand, falls in the river, and is washed away. You hike on to the rest stop where you meet up with the owner of the book. ***You say:***

Situation 9: You are a member of the local chapter of a national ski club. Every month the club goes on a ski trip. You are in a club meeting now helping to plan this month's trip. The club president is sitting next to you and asks to borrow a pen. You cannot lend your pen because you only have one and need it to take notes yourself. ***You say:***

Situation 10: You are applying for a new job in a small company and want to make an appointment for an interview. You know the manager is very busy and only schedules interviews in the afternoon from one to four o'clock. However, you currently work in the afternoon. You are in the office this morning turning in your application form when you see the manager. ***You say:***